

VZCZCXYZ1228
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBP #0643/01 2791153
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 061153Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0764
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

UNCLAS BAMAKO 000643

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR S/GPI AND S/P

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [BEXP](#) [BTIO](#) [EAID](#) [OEXC](#) [OIIP](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#)
SMIG, TSPL, EINV, ML
SUBJECT: MALI REACHES OUT TO ITS DIASPORA

REF: STATE 86401

1.(SBU) Summary: Over four million Malians, or roughly one quarter to one third of all Malians, live outside of Mali. While the largest numbers of Malian emigrants live in nearby Cote D'Ivoire and Senegal, there are also significant communities in France, Spain, and the United States. Mali's expatriates are highly organized, and remittances constitute a sizeable portion of Mali's foreign exchange earnings. On September 29, PolOff met with Mamadi Traore, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Malians of the Exterior, to discuss the Malian government's efforts to maintain relations with and offer support to its compatriots living abroad. End Summary.

Land of Emigrants?

¶2. (SBU) On September 29, PolOff met with Mamadi Traore, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Malians of the Exterior and African Integration. According to Traore, the Malian diaspora is four million strong, representing a quarter to one third of all Malians. Traore admitted the strongest pressure behind Malian emigration is poverty and lack of economic opportunity in Mali, but also noted that foreign travel is a valued Malian cultural tradition, repeating the Malian joke that when Neil Armstrong landed on the moon, a Malian vendor approached trying to sell his wares. Although the largest numbers of Malian emigrants are in neighboring countries such as Cote D'Ivoire and Senegal, there are also significant Malian communities in France and Spain. According to the Embassy's consular section, Malian communities in the United States can be found in New York City, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Arizona.

¶3. (SBU) The Malian diaspora is highly organized. Malian diasporans have formed associations at the level of each host major host country, with delegates representing that host country's association in the Mali-based High Council of Malian Expatriates. The purpose of the High Council is to bring difficulties of expatriates to the attention of the Malian government, and assure representation of expatriates in domestic political discussions. In addition, Malian expatriates join "village associations," consisting of expatriates who originate from the same town or village in Mali. This is facilitated by tight kinship networks that result in many Malians from the same village emigrating to the same location abroad.

An Economic Necessity

¶4. (SBU) The Malian diaspora contributes significantly to the economy of Mali in the form of remittances. According to the

World Bank, remittances from Malian expatriates totaled 177 million USD in 2006, or 3.3% of Mali's GDP that year. Similarly, remittances form a large share of Mali's foreign exchange, equivalent to 18 percent of its total exports and surpassing livestock and cotton exports as a source of external income. The national figures fail to reflect the importance of the remittances for individual communities, as the number of emigrants (and remittances) is highest in rural areas that have been hardest hit by the vagaries of an agriculture-based economy.

¶ 15. (SBU) In addition to remittances, the village associations pool financial resources in order to fund small infrastructure improvements in the community of origin. Such improvements include wells, schools, clinics, and even mosques. Traore provided the example of his home village of Yelimani, in Kayes region. Yelimani is one of a group of 12 closely-knit villages, which were formerly served by one school building built by the French in 1956 and which had no primary health care facility. According to Traore, village associations abroad paid for the construction of small school houses and simple health clinics in each of the 12 villages.

The Government sees an Opportunity

¶ 16. (SBU) The Ministry of Malians of the Exterior and African Integration was originally a division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2004, the Direction was upgraded to Ministry status because the Malian Government recognized that the massive Malian diaspora represented Mali's largest untapped asset. Today, the Ministry's role includes both assisting Malians abroad (e.g., the Minister recently traveled to Libya to argue for improved conditions for Malians held in detention there) and facilitating opportunities for members of the Malian diaspora to re-invest in Mali. For example, the Ministry arranges for Malians abroad with advanced degrees in domains where local knowledge is lacking to return to Mali to teach courses at local universities and training colleges.

¶ 17. (SBU) The Ministry's most difficult task is convincing expatriates to invest in business opportunities in Mali. Traore said that Malian expatriates have the same misgivings about investing in Mali as do foreign businesspersons -- lack of infrastructure, high rates of corruption, bureaucratic hurdles, etc. The Ministry attempts to allay those concerns by facilitating contacts between Malian expatriates and local businesses and financiers that can serve their needs.

Managing the Diaspora

¶ 18. (SBU) As Mali's dependence on its diaspora has grown, so too has the need to deal with the concerns of host countries facing large numbers of illegal economic migrants. Mali has entered into a number of immigration accords with several European countries -- although not yet France -- to control the flow of Malians across the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, Mali is currently serving as the site of a Pilot Project known as CIGEM, short for Center for Information and Management of Migrations. CIGEM's purpose is to locate employers in Europe in need of temporary labor and match those employers up with Malians willing to provide that labor, who are then provided temporary work visas in the European Union. If the CIGEM project is a success, it will be expanded to other West African nations.

¶ 19. (SBU) Malian expatriates have found a variety of methods to participate in the political life of their nation. Malian expatriates, who are able to vote at Malian diplomatic missions in their host country, are actively courted by politicians seeking office. Recently, the President of the up-and-coming Malian party CODEM, Housseini Guindo, traveled to Cote D'Ivoire, in part to address a crowd of thousands of

Maliens resident in that country. Malian expatriates are also exceptionally active on Malian interactive news websites and blogs, including www.maliweb.net and [http.kidal.info](http://http://kidal.info).

¶10. (SBU) Embassy is not aware of any time the Malian government has specifically requested the assistance of the diaspora in disaster relief, nor has the diaspora distinguished itself as either a hindrance or a help in matters of conflict resolution.

Embassy's Role

¶11. (SBU) To date, the Embassy has not engaged in any public diplomacy outreach specifically targeting the Malian diaspora. While the Embassy has been contacted by Malian expatriate groups, those contacts have primarily solicited financial support only, and current Embassy staff do not recall any specific instance in which the Embassy was able to fund the project proposed, either because the project bore no relation to the Embassy's strategic goals, or because of budgetary limitations. More generally, PAO believes current budgeting levels do not allow for a robust public diplomacy program that is aimed specifically at Malians living abroad. The Embassy POC for this submission is Fred Noyes, who can be reached at (223) 2070 2533 or noyesfn@state.gov

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